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SUBJECT: ANNUAL OVERSEAS SECURITY ADVISORY COUNCIL (OSAC)
CRIME AND SAFETY REPORT 2009

REF: 08 STATE 132056

¶1. (U) The following information constitutes RSO Colombo's Annual OSAC Crime and Safety Report for 2008. All responses are keyed to the format as detailed reftel.

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¶I. Overall Crime and Safety Situation:

While Sri Lanka has a high crime rate, relatively little common crime has been directed against the American community residing in Colombo. Most of the violent crimes occur within the local community and involve people who know each other. Routine petty crime (such as pickpockets, theft from hotel rooms, etc.) is common, and preventable, if the traveler takes the appropriate safeguards. Street hustlers, or "touts," are common around the hotels, shopping centers, and tourist sites. Credit card fraud is increasing. The Regional Security Office (RSO) has received several reports from U.S. Government travelers and private American citizens concerning credit card fraud. However, it does not appear as if the fraud occurs at point of sale; rather, the perpetrator(s) somehow gain access to a victim's card number, use the number to produce counterfeit cards, and make purchases in other countries (Thailand and Malaysia, for example). Travelers should pay in cash, when and where possible. If using a credit card in Sri Lanka, travelers should closely review billing statements to ensure that no unauthorized or suspicious purchases appear on their statements.

In the first week of 2009, Government of Sri Lanka (GSL) armed forces captured Kilinochchi, which had served as the de facto capital city for the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). In the two days following the fall of Kilinochchi, a LTTE suicide bomber self-detonated at the Air Force Headquarters in Colombo and the LTTE placed a parcel bomb in a popular Colombo market place. These attacks, with more possible in the immediate future, were likely in response to the GSL's achievements in the North. RSO and other Embassy offices anticipate that the LTTE will continue to attack using similar methods in other locations throughout Sri Lanka, focusing on "soft" targets in Colombo, the Eastern Province, and possibly other locations in the South.

II. Political Violence

The conflict between the LTTE, a Tamil separatist group, and the GSL has been ongoing for over 25 years. On January 2, 2008, the GSL announced that it was abrogating the February 22, 2002 Cease Fire Agreement (CFA). The annulment led to more attacks on Sri Lankans in the South, especially in Colombo, as the GSL pressed the LTTE militarily in the North. GSL sources speculate that the LTTE will be less risk adverse in their attacks and more willing to accept civilian casualties to achieve objectives. According to RSO Colombo statistics, since the termination of the CFA there have been 72 attacks attributed to the LTTE, resulting in 240 deaths and 1,211 injuries, with 109 of those deaths specifically occurring in Colombo. Also in 2008, the LTTE has increased its targeting of the country's public transportation system and infrastructure by launching 16 attacks on the public

buses and bus stands (12 in Colombo), and five attacks on the public train systems throughout Sri Lanka. (Note - The U.S. Embassy travel policy current prohibits American citizen employees and their family members from using public trains and buses.)

On October 8, 1997, the Secretary of State designated the LTTE as a Foreign Terrorist Organization (FTO). This designation means that it is unlawful for the LTTE or any of its front organizations to raise funds or use banking institutions to transfer the funds in the United States. The designation also allows the U.S. to freeze LTTE assets and to deny the issuance of visas to any member or supporter of the LTTE. In accordance with the law, the LTTE filed an appeal challenging the designation in Federal District Court. The appeal eventually made it to the Supreme Court, which declined to hear the case.

In the past, the LTTE has not specifically targeted American citizens or other American interests. Recent actions by the LTTE demonstrate that the potential for accidental involvement of foreigners does not deter LTTE terrorist actions. One such example was an attack that occurred on January 8, 2008, when the LTTE remotely detonated a claymore type device 11 miles north of Colombo, killing the Sri Lankan Minister of Nation Building, D.M. Dassanayake, on a heavily traveled road that is the primary route to the Bandaranaike International Airport. An attack of a similar nature occurred on May 16, 2008, when a suspected LTTE suicide bomber killed 12 people and injured 95 more on Lotus Road in Colombo, near the Hilton Hotel. Minutes prior to this attack, a State Department employee on a temporary duty assignment in Colombo had passed through this area and narrowly escaped injury (in fact, the employee was the first person to report the incident to the RSO).

The LTTE increased attacks in areas of high public concentrations and continues to disregard collateral damage to innocent bystanders, as exemplified by bombing incidents of market places, buses, bus stands, and the railway infrastructure. On April 6, 2008, during the starting ceremony of a well-publicized foot race, a suicide bomber killed senior cabinet member Jeyaraj Fernandopulle, his personal security body guard, and an armed forces colonel. Fourteen bystanders died as well, including a beloved Olympics coach, and 95 people were injured.

The LTTE usually targets key Sri Lankan government officials, military/police installations, and economic targets. Favored techniques include truck bombs, suicide bombers and drive-by assassinations from motorcycles, bicycles, or three wheelers. Most recently on October 9, 2008, a suicide bomber in Anuradhapura successfully attacked and killed 27 people and injuring another 90 others, while specifically targeting the offices of a national political party. Among the deceased in this brutal attack were the retired Sri Lankan Major General Janaka Perera and his wife. The GSL has attributed the attack to the LTTE.

Prior to the 2002 CFA, security checkpoints and proactive intervention by the security forces interdicted several suicide attacks before the bombers engaged their intended target. Unfortunately, interdicted suicide bombers often detonated their devices to avoid capture. Although many security checkpoints were dismantled following signing of the CFA, security checkpoints are reappeared in vast numbers as after the GSL annulled the CFA and increased military operations against the LTTE.

In the past, several bombings were preceded by gunfire initiated by the government security forces or by the attackers themselves. In the event that a traveler hears gunfire and is outside, the traveler should either seek cover or depart the area immediately. If the traveler is inside, s/he should move away from any windows and attempt to find an interior hallway. In the majority of the bombings, flying glass has caused most of the civilian casualties.

Radical Buddhist factions have been known to attack Christian churches and foment anti-Christian sentiment across Sri Lanka. The Embassy has received reports of numerous incidents that targeted Christian churches, pastors, and congregations in 2008. The events included harassing congregations, burning churches or meeting places, disrupting worship services, and even beatings of worshippers or clergy by mobs (often led by, or at the behest of, Buddhist monks). Foreigners traveling to Sri Lanka for work, including religious charity or volunteer work, must enter on the proper visa category, or they will be subject to detention and/or deportation.

Demonstrations in the capital Colombo are common and can quickly become full-blown riots. The Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP), a Sinhalese ultra-nationalist political party, organized many of the recent protests. The JVP opposes any kind of agreement with LTTE and has withdrawn from the coalition government in protest over perceived appeasement of the LTTE. On August 14, 2008, an anti-GSL demonstration by 3000-plus members of JVP-affiliated student groups erupted into violence as the police service halted demonstrators two blocks from a GSL installation. The U.S. Embassy is located across the street from the GSL facility. Riot police and demonstrators engaged in heated confrontations for over an hour as tear gas wafted over the Embassy.

III. Post Specific Concerns

1A. The political climate on the island is tense and can change at any moment. Please exercise caution when traveling in the country. American citizens are strongly advised against travel to the Northern Province and most of the Eastern Province of Sri Lanka. All of the Northern Province remains dangerous. In Anuradhapura District of the Northern Province, the areas north of Medawachchiya, the A14 road, and the road from Medawachchiya and Horowupatna are dangerous. Non-official travel by U.S. Government personnel to the Eastern Province, other than the A6 road corridor and Trincomalee Town in Trincomalee District, and areas in Ampara District south of the A4 road and west of the Maha Oya, is prohibited. Ongoing fighting between government and LTTE forces may pose severe hazards to American citizens traveling in the region. Official travel by U.S. Government personnel to these areas in the North and East is restricted, and unofficial travel is prohibited. Americans should consider their personal security foremost before considering traveling or working in northern or eastern Sri Lanka.

1B. Transportation Accidents

Sri Lankan drivers are reckless, and police rarely enforce traffic laws. Americans are urged to drive defensively, and, when walking, keeping in mind that pedestrians do not have the right of way. In the event of an accident, Americans should be aware that crowds might gather and become aggressive, particularly if the accident involves a bus, trishaw (3-wheeled vehicle) or taxi.

IV. Police and Emergency Response

Police officers are generally ill-equipped and poorly trained. Response time varies and can be lengthy depending on the type of incident. If you are the victim of a crime, in addition to reporting to local police, contact the U.S. Embassy for assistance.

RSO recommends that American citizens, if harassed by the police, take note of the badge numbers of the officers involved and notify the Embassy as soon as possible thereafter. If detained by police, notify the Embassy's Consular Section or the RSO as soon as possible. In some cases, the police have detained Canadian and Norwegian citizens of Sri Lankan origin for extended periods and without consular notification. However, U.S. citizens of Sri Lankan origin have not reported encountering this problem.

Police Emergency Line (94)-11-243-3333

V. Medical Contact Information

Apollo Hospital: 4531066
Asiri Hospital: 2588267
Nawaloka Hospital: 2544444

VI. Travel Precautions: Tips to Avoid Becoming a Victim

When visiting Sri Lanka or other countries around the world, it is always a good idea to keep in mind the following general security advice:

- Keep a low profile and avoid obvious displays of wealth or national origin.
- Avoid setting consistent patterns in your activities around the city.
- Avoid carrying large amounts of cash, credit cards, or important documents that you do not immediately need.
- Avoid demonstrations and large gatherings of people.

Travelers should always carry a copy of their passport rather than the original and leave an itinerary with someone they trust. American citizens should keep the phone number of the American Embassy available in the event assistance is required from the Consular Section, American Citizens Services. U.S. citizens are encouraged to register with the Embassy and to obtain updated information on travel and security in Sri Lanka.

VII. How to Contact the Embassy

--U.S. Embassy Switchboard: 249-8500
--U.S. Embassy After hours: 249-8888 (Note: Embassy working hours are 8 to 5:30 PM, Mondays through Thursdays, and 8 to 12 PM Fridays)
--Regional Security Office: 249-8738
--Regional Security Office email address: rsocolombo2@state.gov
--Consular Section: 249-8839
--U.S. Embassy Colombo Website: <http://usembassy.state.gov/srilanka>

VIII. Overseas Security Advisory Council (OSAC) Country Council

All private sector security executives are encouraged to contact the Regional Security Officer for individual consultations and briefings, as well as the dates and times of future meetings of the Country Council at the American Embassy Colombo

13. Point of contact for this message is ARSO Aaron LaFortune. ARSO may be reached via telephone at (011-94-11-249-8885) or MSG Post 1 after hours at (249-8888), or via DOS unclassified and classified email systems.

Blake